

Socialist Worker Review

15p

One year of the S.L.P

Elections

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ISSUE

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SOCIALIST WORKERS TENDENCY

The SWT are standing six candidates for the Standing committee and the Natinal Executive Committee on the politics outlined in this issue of the Socialist Workers Review. Our candidates are as follows :

Vice-chair / PRO ; Kieran Allen

Asa. General Sec. ; Brian Trench

N.E.C. Brian Trench
 Kieran Allen
 John Cane
 Joan Kelly
 Patsy Moran
 Tom O'Connor

SOCIALIST WORKER REVIEW

Conference Issue, for sale to SLP members only. This is a special issue produced for conference. We shall be returning to our normal format with the next issue.

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STRIKES 78

"1978 seems destined to go down in industrial history as the year when the lid blew off the kettle, when just about every group of workers from nurses and gardai to milkmen and postmen either went on strike or threatened to do so." (Irish Times, Annual Review 1978)

To recap: the Post Office technicians strike; Aer Lingus clerical workers; Automobile Association; Fiat; Lombard and Ulster; Band I; Cement Roadstone; Nitrigin Bireann craftsmen; British Leyland; Tynagh Mines (lock-out); Arigna Mines; Premier Dairies milkmen; Local Government engineers; Dublin Corporation pipe joiners; ESB work-to-rule in three power stations; RTE journalists and Equity members; Irish Shell clerical workers and so on.

In the North, workers probably suffered a greater number of defeats but this was more a reflection of the overall political situation in Britain. Very early on in the year, the firemen more or less lost. Nevertheless, in the last few months many firms have broken through the 5% limit. The strike at Fords in the North was absolutely solid and smashed through the limit. So too did B.O.C.

And major strike action threatened, or in progress, in 1979 include: NBU Busmen, postmen, nurses and women telephonists for equal pay. In the North, the really major battles again centre around issues in the British industrial scene. While the attempt of Northern oil-drivers to prolong the strike looks set for defeat, the lorry drivers are posing a major threat to hold the limit at around 5%.

There are many smaller scale strikes and work-to-rules (Philips, Kilroys, Listers, Unidare, a host of AGEMOU workplaces, Keenfoods, Dublin hotels, etc.) Many quiet settlements were being made without strike action (clerical workers in Bord Failte, Ashenhurst Williams Ltd., Dissalelectrix, Citroen Importers), which often improved upon the terms of the National Wage Agreement.

Last year saw the revival of a more militant tactic - the march by striking workers. The IPCSU strikers had a massive and spirited demonstration in Dublin, supported by outside trade unionists and the Trades Council. This (and the first Trades Council sponsored May Day march for years) may have encouraged marches by IMP workers, women telephonists, Central Bank workers and dockers (about tax) in Cork. Tynagh mine workers occupied the company head office, and Confexin workers occupied and picketed the IDA.

What we were witnessing in 1978 was a pay revolt. A scattered, and sometimes disunited, revolt. Not one of the strikes was consciously aimed as a battering ram against the National Wage Agreement. However, as employers insisted on the terms of the NWA (against diverse types of claims, many of them for better productivity terms), they became de facto challenges to the Wage Agreement and to wage restraint in general (because in some cases management didn't even invoke the NWA as such).

Underlying such a revolt was the increased confidence and higher targets workers derived from the upturn in the Irish economy. No matter how temporary or short-lived that recovery may be, it means that the demoralising scourge of unemployment was not seen as the immediate threat it was in the past. Victories - whether won in strikes or conceded quietly by employers - were quickly spread to produce increases far in excess of the wage agreement

terms. To some extent this 'wage drift' was undoubtedly legitimised by the 2% clause in the agreement.

A parallel aspect was the development of a new militancy in the public service, where Kathleen Ryan's embargo on special increases and the general need of the government to hold down wage and production costs in its own backyard is meeting a challenge. This is reflected in the weakening of the hitherto stalwart support for NSA in the public service unions as they attempt to catch up with gains made in the private sector.

A RUMOUR WITH WEAKNESSES

The experience of the 1978 strikes, however, shows serious weaknesses in the movement, that must be overcome in a free collective bargaining situation - weaknesses which in many ways come from an eight year absence of free collective bargaining. 1978 was NOT a year of continuous and glorious victories for different groups of workers - even if the ice was broken.

To take some examples:

Roadstone: although the settlement was termed a victory by AGEMOU it was more of a draw than a Waterloo for the company. The AGEMOU executive kept the struggle at a low key, declining to co-operate with the Support Group in building public and trade union support and members began to dwindle away from the strike, with a picket-passing expedition (including AGEMOU strikers) being planned just before the strike ended.

Of course the self-imposed isolation was dwarfed beside the organised scabbery of the ITGWU and the suspension of the union from Congress. The sick parade of dirty dealings by the trade union leadership reached new depths of betrayal in the Roadstone strike of 1978.

Irish Shell: Oilworkers had shown powerful unity and organisation in their 1975 strike. But this winter's Shell strike could once again serve as a warning against over-optimistic assumptions. Oilworkers in Bannah Oil worked overtime to supply Shell's biggest customer, Mex-Maxol, in the confidence of the ITGWU. The clerical workers main claim itself was not won.

And in one major factory Unidare: an unofficial and determined work-to-rule over a number of months, by shiftworkers for time-and-a-quarter shift allowance, stumbled in defeat - a defeat helped along by the isolation of the shiftworkers from other and the undermining activities of the Union officers.

A further pointer to the need for sober groundwork rather than elated victory slogans was the performance of workers in relation to closures. There were new, but limited and unsuccessful, departures in relation to National Board and Irish Leathers (Waterford and Wexford) and Van Hool (Dublin) but the closures at Irish Board (Athy), Smith & Pearsons (Dublin) Leaf Ltd. (Bilclare), AET etc., and the redundancies at Bolands (Dublin) occurred with little more than a whimper from the workforces. And in both the former cases, the support workers mobilised in the streets was not translated into militant action at factory level against the closure. In the case of the National Board of Paper Mills in Waterford, the ITGWU bureaucracy played a decisive role in spreading defeatism and pessimism and thus defeating proposals for an occupation of the factory (see Socialist Worker Review, No. 5).

If these disputes can supply any lessons they are:

1. That solidarity and unity desperately need to be built up again, and,
2. The power of the trade union bureaucracy - in particular of that crew in Liberty Hall - needs to be broken.

Both together spell out the need to build a rank and file movement. A cliché, true, but never a truer one.

The question really is how do we overcome the legacy of successive wage agreements and rebuild the unity and solidarity that is so desperately needed. The first requirement is, of course, the building of solidarity and wider support for actual strikes that are taking place - especially for isolated or unpopular strikes. The immediate priority must be the bus strike in the South and the SLP needs to devote massive resources to organising support for this strike in every area where there is a bus depot. That means leaflets and public meetings to explain the case; it means pushing for collections amongst other workers and mass pickets of the army attempt to strike break; it means presenting the strike in its wider context of a revolt against wage restraint. Much of the meagre industrial activity of SLP members last year took the form of this type of solidarity work - so there is a small experience to work.

One resolution from the Dublin North Central branch attempts to address this problem of rebuilding the unity amongst rank and file workers. But its assumption is that unity can be simply rebuilt through posing a clear and simple demand which we must then use to change the whole complexion of the existing struggles. That demand is for "£1 extra in wages for every 1% rise in prices." The Finglas Branch however are arguing an amendment to delete this proposal.

The abstract demand for, e.g., "£1 per week extra in wages for every 1% rise in prices" (Dublin North-Central) would have no effect in uniting the strongly organised and the weak. Under free collective bargaining, if this demand were won by, say, oilworkers, it would still have to be communicated to, let alone passed on to, say, clothing trade workers. What is needed is concrete links and solidarity between workers in struggle and stronger sections of the trade union movement, common claims and consultation between the different sections in a workplace. This is what the Finglas amendment urges - the active rebuilding of unity, from the bottom up. A further indication of the distance of the 'indexation' demand from reality is that it does not relate to any of the current claims and strike demands of the present pay-revolt, which are for straight claims on the 'basic'. Furthermore, the 'indexation' demand is linked to the construction 'of its own cost of living index' by the trade unions, which is not only unrealistic and impractical but since the 'trade union movement' is presently dominated by a bureaucracy, there is no guarantee that they would use, or even be honest about, a truer index. It is certainly out of place as a demand in an immediate campaign against National Wage Agreements or social contract, which is where the North Central resolution wants it.

As with all militant initiatives in the trade union movement, the lead in building solidarity for strikes, etc., is very much dependent on the Left. As Dermot Boucher says in the current Internal Bulletin the present wave of industrial militancy stands as an indictment of the Irish Left - not, however, because the strikes are "apolitical", as he claims, but because of the negligible influence of the Left in unions and the workplaces (fathered not just by the small size of the Left, but also by the lack of priority and interest it gives in organising within the unions.)

SLP ACTIVITIES

What has been the SLP's record in strike intervention in 1978? Sporadic, modest and highly dependent on local initiative. The West Galway Branch were active around the Tynagh mines lock-out, pressing for official union backing and attempting to gain wider support by involving miners' wives and arranging meetings with Tara miners. Collections in Galway, etc. The Navan Branch sought (through the Trades Council, leaflets and a public meeting) to prevent the closure of Slane Manufacturing. Both Branches

received the wrath of the ITGWU officialdom. The Belfast Branch made contact with the Ballantyne strike in Coleraine and the Waterford Branch and the Trade Union and Unemployed Workers Group were involved in the opposition to the closure of National Board and Paper Mills. The Waterford Branch also supported the Robie Sports sit-in and intervened in the Irish Leathers closure in Dungarvan, where some recruitment to the Party was made. At National Board and Paper Mills the workers asked that an SLP leaflet be read out at a general meeting. In Dublin the TUUG members were involved in support groups for three disputes: Confexin, Claddyknit and Roadstone. The latter was formed on the initiative of SLP members and was widened out into the SWA issue, with a large public meeting being organised. Dublin SLP members assisted in picketing at the Shelbourne and Lombard and Ulster strikes, to good effect in the latter strike especially.

Of course many SLP members were involved in disputes as trade unionists or in their own workplaces. The above is a sketch of specifically SLP organised intervention.

The record hasn't been as bad as you may have thought. Apart from two or three small left wing groups the SLP was the only socialist organisation to have any input into the industrial struggles of '78, and on a much bigger scale no socialist paper came anywhere near 'Socialist Labour' in covering the strikes, often with articles from the inside. But why is there an unmistakable, and unmistakable, impression among Party activists that the SLP has not made contact with the movement of the past year? Because the Party, centrally and as a whole, has not been involved. As regards strike intervention the activity, when it comes down to the personnel involved, has been almost totally confined to the members of two Tendencies plus a few individuals. As with many Party activities, industrial activities are unconsciously or consciously farmed out to particularly interested groupings in the manner of a FEDERATION. But the SLP is not a federation. The struggle at the point of production is too important to be left to the Tendencies. There has been no direction from above (NEC/SC) on specific important strikes. If it has discussed the party's perspectives on how we must relate to the current wave of industrial activity, it has kept those perspectives a secret from most of the rest of the party. The TUUG Group has not been treated as a serious prospect by the leading members of the Party and as a result the TUUG Group, alone, has not had the authority, the resources or the credibility within the Party to mobilise big numbers. It's a chicken and egg situation because only the Tendencies (with some notable exceptions) have bothered about the TUUG Group, it has become "dominated" by Tendency members (the SWT); and because it's dominated by the SWT it's treated with cynicism by the Party's leading members.

It must be said, however, that the TUUG Committee (and hence also the SWT) could have done more to break out of this by going to the membership, by visiting branches and by bringing more suggestions and initiatives to the members on how to mobilise their considerable amount of trade union contacts around specific disputes and issues. With an active committee of about four it was difficult.

If 1979 is to be any different the Party as a whole and the branches must come to see strikes as significant areas of work. 1979 will be, above all, a year of industrial warfare. The TUUG Group itself must be broadened out and become more active. (However, while the broadening out of the Group would solve the effect upon it of the SLP's thorn in the right side - social democratic distance from the struggle - it may introduce that other thorn in the left side of the Party - sectarian competition. This has to be avoided.)

SOCIALISTS

ELECTIONS

Elections have always been portrayed as the most exciting of political events. It is thought that they represent the time of 'real' political discussion in contrast to, for example, the humdrum "apolitical" issues on the factory floor. Part of the excitement may be due to the fact that even the bourgeois parties attempt to spell out in clear explicit terms the basis of their politics. Thousands of people who pretend a total disinterest in politics at other times, are prepared to engage in political arguments by the dozen to canvassers on their doorsteps. And at the end of the day we get an idea, in no matter how distorted a form, of where the great mass of the people are at politically.

That notion that elections bring out the real political debate may be one explanation of why the election fever has so obviously gripped the present leadership of the SLP. In contrast to the fact they have consistently failed to give real leadership and guidance to the party on almost every other issue, they have now consciously set out to push the party in one particular direction. But although they are now providing leadership of a kind - it also involves steering the party in a fundamentally wrong direction. It is the direction of electoralism.

THE BIG PUSH

Let's look at some of the evidence for this push in the last few months:

- The NEC/Standing Committee took upon itself the right to set the dates for selection conventions. They also instructed all branches to hold these conventions before the January conference. As a result, a considerable amount of effort was spent in encouraging (or cajoling) branches to hold their selection meetings at the earliest possible date - despite the fact that no other guidance on what sort of electoral intervention or indeed policy to be fought for, was available. Quite clearly the aim in holding early selection conventions is to encourage branches to devote the maximum of resources to elections over the next six months and to enable them to project the individual names or 'images' of the candidates.

- The notion that candidates should only be run in areas where we have a record of work to point to has been completely thrown out the window. When three branches in Dublin discussed the possibility of running one or possibly two candidates between them, the pressure was turned on for a candidate in each area - irrespective of the weaknesses of the branches. More seriously, the Standing Committee has attempted to run candidates in areas where we don't even have a branch - in the hope that one can be built around an election campaign. To take one example: Dublin South County. The attempt failed as the neighboring branch, Dun Laoghaire, refused to have anything to do with it.

- A series of press statements and leaks apparently emanating from party sources have appeared in the press promising a strong election campaign. A press statement in November claimed that the party was aiming to win 10 seats in Dublin - i.e. more than half the present Labour Party seats. Other leaks have included the "probability" that Noel Browne will contest the European elections - despite the fact that considerable disagreement exists within the party even about standing.

A SERIOUS PARTY?

What is the underlying philosophy behind this enthusiasm for emphasising the elections? A glimpse of the reasoning may be discerned from a document

in the Internal Bulletin No. 3 written by Dermot Boucher. He begins with the most pessimistic of assumptions: "an election campaign is the only time that the great mass of the people take any real interest in politics." If ever there was a classic social democratic statement about the supposed unchangeable apathy of the people, there you have it. Ignore the fantastic politicisation of the great mass of the nationalist population in the North during the height of the anti-imperialist struggle; the effect of the women's movement internationally and potentially here too; ignore how ideas can be changed in the course of the small scale industrial struggles that occur day in day out on the factory floor - people only get awakened at election times. It is not surprising that he concludes by arguing: "the importance of the Election cannot be over-stressed. Our performance next June will determine whether we will emerge as a serious political party or whether we are to be relegated to the ranks of the many impotent, insignificant sects." He also, logically enough, calls for election preparations "to commence almost immediately".

There is, of course, always a danger that a political party can be relegated to the ranks of a sect. But that danger is only a real one if the party is so introspective that it systematically misses out on agitating in the external world around the main opportunities that are available. The difference between a sect and a party is not determined by its voting figures - much and all as the bourgeois press would like to make out. It is determined by whether or not there exists a leadership within the party which turns the party outward to intervening - and therefore winning respect - in the day-to-day struggles of the working class.

STALE-MATE

The present leadership of the party certainly realise that we have reached something of a stale-mate. The initial flush of enthusiasm and stream of recruits has slowed down. But, unfortunately, the leadership don't realise their own responsibility in the matter - at a time when the opportunities for socialists have never been so great. Because of their own lack of enthusiasm for turning the party to direct agitation - (witness the only badly organised campaign we've had, the Week of Action on Contraception; the failure to carry through the meetings on H-Block; the failure to even seriously discuss at NEC level the party's perspectives for intervening in the current strike wave) - the only answer they can give to this stale-mate is through performing well in the elections. Specifically, if we can beat the Stickies at their own game, we will then be seen as the most serious and credible party and therefore more or less automatically draw a radicalised layer towards ^{us}. Again Dermot Boucher claims: "It (an election campaign) is by far the greatest source of recruits for a party, as many passive sympathisers are activated by the campaign, add remain on afterwards as party members."

The view that the party should be built through elections and that elections are the primary arena of struggle, we call electoralism. But are elections ever "the greatest source of recruits for the Party"? Let us look at the evidence. The SLP if it were to take this course, would not be the first to do so. The SWP and the Labour Party can teach us a few lessons in this respect. Although they are often dormant for most of the year in many areas, come election time and we find that their ranks are filled with election workers, canvassers and helpers. But unfortunately, as soon as the elections are over, they deflate just as quickly and only a small dedicated core remains. Why? Because those who have been 'recruited' are not recruited to any real political perspectives - they have only joined in with the enthusiasm of elections. Not only do they often not fully understand the party's policy, but more importantly, they are not recruited to a set of ideas which guide their day-to-day work once the elections are over. Those parties have no campaigns or agitations to point to once the

election is over. And unless you have established other non-electoral areas of work and have argued throughout your electioneering that the vote is not essential but rather the support that is generated for the parties (and other organisations) campaigns and activity, electoral support collapses like sand. The experience proves that where branches of the Labour Party or the SFWP have swelled at election time, they have quickly shrunk afterwards.

THE PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

Unfortunately, there is a section of the SLP who, while recognising that the God of parliamentary reform is dead, still believe that life must continue on as before. They fail to draw out the connections between rejecting the parliamentary road and: we should use elections. It is important that revolutionaries should point to these connections.

Essentially we would argue that we should reject the parliamentary road for two very good and practical reasons. Firstly, parliament offers no real control over either the state itself or society as a whole. At one stage, parliament represented a real debating forum in society where the different wings of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes thrashed out their views. Today the increased centralisation of decision-making and the dominance of whole sectors of the economy by multi-national corporations mean that the real decisions which affect society are more likely to be taken in the board rooms than in a parliament. Further as a reflection of this, the parliament is increasingly less able to control the various parts of the State apparatus. The professional civil service, the judges, the army generals are drawn from the upper classes who are quite in tune with these developments and absolutely determined to maintain their privileges - despite any purely verbal outputs from a parliament. Secondly, the ruling class has shown itself quite capable to utilise the lack of control which left wing parliament may have to mobilise the forces of violence. The experience of Chile shows that the army and the Courts will act quite independently and with the utmost of violence to defend their class interests. Faced with the violence of the upper classes - parliament is rendered even more impotent in times of crisis.

It is often thought that local councils are somehow exceptions to this analysis and embody a more real sense of democracy. In fact their impotence and uselessness as a lever of change is even more glaring. Increasingly, greater control over local affairs rests with the managers and then staff. And even they must operate within the limits determined by those with the real power in this society - the bosses of the board rooms.

However, the parliament and the local councils are not just useless weapons. The fact that the overall conflicts of interest within society are represented through the parliament is an important ideological weapon for our rulers. The illusions in the parliamentary system and the electoral process lend an important element of stability to the system. For, although the great mass of the people still believe in the rules of democracy, our rulers also know that the electoral process is itself based against the forces of change. The media as a whole, plays a decisive role at election time and its control is in the hands of the capitalists or the state. But more than that the electoral system atomises people. It cuts them off from collective discussion and decision-making and people are therefore more likely to fall back on their traditional beliefs to explain political developments. They are also more open to the ideas pumped at them from the media. If we want a graphic example of the effects of the different forms of democracy on consciousness we have only to look at the experience within the unions. The right wing of the

unions consistently argue for secret ballots or postal ballots whereas the left has fought for decisions to be made at open branch meetings after full discussions. The postal ballot, in particular, has played an important role in the comeback of the AUEW in Britain, for example, although it is not the only reason for that comeback.

OUR TASKS

What then can we take from this analysis? Firstly, the great mass of the people still have tremendous faith in the validity of democracy in this system. We therefore have to participate in elections if for no other reason than to help to expose those illusions. But those illusions can only be broken down if we seem to argue in our election work that a vote for our 'programme' or our policy is going to achieve nothing in itself. It is the self-activity of our own supporters that really counts for anything. To take a concrete example: it is pointless for the SLP to put a tremendous amount of work into 'clinics' which simply foster the illusion that the T.D. or councillor can get things done. When there are issues in, say, a housing estate, we must argue it is that only the building of strong tenants' associations committed to direct action that can solve the problems. Electoral support for SLP candidates must therefore be channelled into these areas of work.

Secondly, although we participate in elections, we must also recognise that they are not the primary areas of struggle. Still less, the key means to building a revolutionary party. Electoral work must be based on - and point to - other areas of direct agitation. In the course of our electoral work, we should be able to say: votes in themselves will achieve little; it's activity around a right to work campaign, in supporting the rank and file groups in the unions, in building a campaign around H-Block, that the decisive changes will come about. Vote for the SLP but also join its activities and strengthen the organisation of the working class.

What does this mean for the SLP in its current state of development? Unfortunately the party has not turned itself outward to direct agitation in the class. The key priority is to do so. Only when we have established a credibility and a record around our work in the unions, with strikes, in building campaigns, will we have something to point to at election time. Until we do so we should only run a limited election campaign. Most of our resources should be turned to other areas of work. We cannot then spend the next 6 months gearing up the party for the elections. Rather we should be turned to other areas of work. We should, rather, only run candidates in areas where we have a record of work which we can direct supporters into after the elections. The purpose of our election work should not only be to make general propaganda but also to point to the specific campaigns and activities the party is engaged in.

That means we must run a very different sort of campaign. Because we are not just interested in votes, door-to-door canvassing is not enough. We need to organise mass sales of Socialist Labour and involve our supporters in selling the paper. We need to have meetings on local housing estates and at factory gates in order to explain our politics and win support for our campaigns. We need to provide regular education meetings for all election workers before and after the elections in order to build on to the recruits that are won.

If we organise our election work on this basis, the SNT believes real gains can be made. But that also means turning the party outwards to direct agitation in the coming months, rather than simply preparing for elections. The other road - the road of electoralism - can only lead to demoralisation in the not so very long term as it fails to live up to its own promises.

A REPLY TO THE W.A.A.

Comrades,

After discussions among the members and the Editorial Board of the SWT, it was decided to reply to the open letter of the WAA as follows:

- (1) While we share an emphasis on the three areas of work which you mention - repression, the fight for women's emancipation and the building of a rank and file movement, you must also realise that there are major differences on how specifically we go about work in these areas. And it is these specifics that count if we are to engage in real action. To take one example: building a rank and file movement. Your comrades have consistently criticised the 'New Liberty Group' in the ITGWU - which our members support - as economicist and opportunist. Your members even claimed at a debate in Wexford that the group has failed because its programme did not include the demands for contraception and abortion. We take a very different view - stressing the openness of rank and file groups rather than attempting to impose the exact details of our party programme on the groups.

More generally, you must also be aware that the SWT is not simply based on a 3 point programme, but has developed positions on many other issues in the course of its existence. Thus on the national question, unemployment and nuclear power we have had many differences with your comrades in the party.

- (2) Whilst we may agree with you that the party is suffering from a lack of leadership and a failure to turn the party outwards, we do not believe it is simply the result of the "reformist politics in the party", or, as you put it, "the problems concerning programme, strategy and tactics."

At its previous conferences, the SLP passed many fine and revolutionary resolutions, in a lot of cases moved and supported by members of the SWT. But programmes on paper and real action are not the same thing. The real weakness of the SLP has been its inability to develop into a coherent and interventionist party. The activities are few in the party, and such as they are, are fragmented according to the particular interest of each person, grouping or Tendency.

The task of the left in the SLP is therefore to develop a political coherence around which the party can be built and sustain itself by intervening and leading working class struggles, building in workplaces and arguing against excessive electoral work. For that you need a united Tendency with a clear idea of what is necessary rather than a debating shop - the debate which the last paragraph of your letter calls for.

- (3) It is our view, that a major block to the development of a united SWT/WAA Tendency is the role of the Irish Workers Group in the WAA. Over the years there have been major differences between those who founded the SWT and the IWG. So much so that during the existence of the Socialist Workers Movement, it was found that the differences necessitated a parting of the ways. The IWG fetish of the 'programme' and their continual hankering after sectarian argument made activity impossible. These differences have persisted in the SLP where we, for our part, have found that the sectarian attitudes of the IWG have repelled many people. Your proposal would mean that within the broad Tendency there would also be two Tendencies contending for their ideas. Tendencies within Tendencies within the SLP will not hold the development of revolutionary ideas within the SLP; rather it

will marginalise the debate.

(4) Therefore, after consideration of your proposal for a new alliance of SWT and WAA we have decided against it.

We recognise that there are some very good SLP members in the WAA, and look forward to working with them at a local level within the party. Also we hope that there will be mutual support for left resolutions at the forthcoming Conference.

If, given the above, you feel that a meeting of representatives of the SWT and the WAA would be of benefit, then this can be arranged.

For the Editorial Board of the SWT
W. Cumming.

ONE YEAR OF S.L.P

Many people think that one of the problems of Tendencies in any party, is that in order to justify their existence, they must be oppositional on every issue, and denigrate the party and membership on every occasion. On the contrary, this is something which must be avoided if Tendencies are to contribute to building the SLP. In the SWT, we see our role as one of developing a political consciousness and cohesiveness around which the party can intervene and recruit in workers struggles.

So, taking the above as read, a look at the party after one year shows up many contradictions - some good, some bad.

To start with, we have a membership which is more committed to the SLP than most people realise, or the SLP deserves, after a year of inactivity. The SLP has been able to draw together socialists from many traditions and from none. People have joined it, who in the main were political but did not come from any of the existing parties or revolutionary groups. The SLP is not just an aggregate of the old Linison people plus the revolutionary left who joined it at its inception. It has the potential to go beyond this, and its future depends on creating a coherent political identity which can intervene and build the party around working class struggles.

The SLP is still a party which has to make up its mind what type of party it wants to be. There is a wide variety of ideas on this existing in the party; from those who would like to see the SLP as a Social Democratic, Labour Party (but without the corruption and right wing policies which exist within the present Irish Labour Party) to those who would like to see it as a vanguard revolutionary party.

The fact that the SLP has not gone in any one direction in its opening year is not in itself a bad thing. It is the very openness of the SLP which has attracted many members to its ranks. The fact that the membership has been able to contribute to the development of the party is a positive feature in a new party. But at some stage the party must act as a unit, with the leadership deciding the priorities and directing the membership into action. This has been the main weakness of the party - its inability to act as a unit.

The activity is fragmented according to personal or Tendency interest. So, for example, the SWT do Trade Union work and are associated with the "Rank and File" perspective; the MSR are into womens' rights and the Artane branch get on with electoral work. A cliché'd view of the party and our activity perhaps, but one not too far from the truth. The Party leadership have been content to allow this fragmentation to continue with one exception - the recent flurry of activity around the forthcoming local elections.

Opportunities have been missed during the last year for the party to make an impact. There was no co-ordinated campaign against the National Wage Agreement. It was left to a number of individuals to do what little was done. When AGEMOU was expelled from the ICTU the party was not to the forefront in its defence. During the dispute at Tynagh when the local branch of the SLP did make a good intervention the NEC bowed to pressure from the ITGWU and did not support and extend support for the initiative.

The one campaign which did get off the ground, the Contraception campaign, was at best half-hearted, and carried only by a couple of comrades in the party. We needed national posters, leaflets, meetings and speakers organised, allied to a propaganda campaign in Socialist Labour.

But the leadership of the party seem content to issue press statements to the Irish Times, etc., and feel the job has been done.

Socialist Labour is beginning to develop a style and direction, after a shaky start, which can help the development of the party. But there is still no relationship between what the party is doing and the contents of the paper. Socialist Labour reports rather than leads. This is not the fault of the comrades who work and write for the paper, few as they are. The paper's job is to give a political lead to its readers and party members, which means developing a political relationship between the leadership of the party and the editorial board of the paper. It is usually in the Irish Times or Hibernia that we read what the party spokespersons have to say on various issues, and in too many cases it has not been party policy which is being put forward - witness John Daly's statement in Derry on the Provisionals or Martin Bibbon's statement on the special criminal courts. Certainly we should go for maximum publicity in the straight press and radio, but the comrades who have been to the fore in issuing statements are not exactly the most prominent writers for Socialist Labour.

Any party such as ours will have problems as it strives to develop, but it is not necessary to create extra problems for ourselves, as have done over the last year. Branches have been left in isolation to get on with the job as best as possible. We have no priority in our activity, and for long periods of time no activity at all. This is pushing the loyalty and commitment of the membership too far; they deserve better. We still have time on our side. The task of this conference is not just to pass policy documents. There are resolutions in most areas of work - unemployment, housing, education, etc. - calling for action. We can and should pass all of these but only in the understanding that the incoming NEC will implement them in a way that can build the party and help the class.

The articles in this internal issue of Socialist Worker Review outline the general view of the SWT on where the party is going. It is also necessary to spell out the resolutions at the forthcoming conference which deserve support. The following is a brief attempt to do so.

RESOLUTIONS ON PARTY ORGANISATIONS

Resolutions 6 and 7: Both these resolutions aim to change the existing branch structure of the party in order to gear us to establishing roots in working class areas and factories. They will assist in the transformation of the SLP into a revolutionary workers party.

Resolution 8: Very correctly points to the apolitical character of the NEC and its failure to give leadership. This resolution, coupled with the amendments from Rathfriland, would help overcome the fragmentation of the party.

RESOLUTIONS ON REPRESSION AND THE NATIONAL STRUGGLE

Resolutions 9 and 10: Strengthens the party's commitment to building TUCAR and demands that at least one member from each branch attend TUCAR committee meetings in the area.

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Resolution 13: Carefully lists out the repeated failures of the NEC to organise SLP activities in the anti-imperialist struggles and therefore to assist in building the party in the North.

Resolution 14: Firmly commits the party against calling for a ceasefire by the Provos by arguing they have a right to bear arms as long as British imperialism remains.

RESOLUTIONS ON THE ECONOMY AND THE UNIONS

For Resolution 18 as amended by Finglas and Dun Laoghaire and the TUWV Group: The effect of the amendment is to delete the supposedly magical formula of indexation as the key to rebuilding unity in the Labour movement and puts the emphasis on common wage claims and links between the rank and file. Also for Resolution 19.

For Resolution 20 as amended by Dub Laoghaire Branch: The effect of the amendment is that the proposed conference is not built for solely a left leadership.

For Resolutions 21, 23 and 24: These resolutions spell out specifically how we should oppose Wage Agreements or Social Contracts and how we should intervene in strikes. Also for resolution 22.

For Resolution 26: This demands greater commitment and support for the Trade Union and Unemployed Workers Group in the party.

RESOLUTIONS ON NUCLEAR POWER

For Resolution 30: This is the clearest anti-nuke resolution and puts the emphasis on raising the issue in the unions.

RESOLUTIONS ON ELECTIONS

Resolution 37: This resolution argues that we must not spend the next six months preparing for elections, but that election work should complement other areas of work. Also for amendment from Meath which calls for a delegate conference to formalise the Election Programme of the party.

RESOLUTIONS ON WOMEN

For Resolution 43 and the Women's Committee amendment to the Wexford Branch: Both these resolutions call for an educational programme on the issue of abortion while maintaining the existing position.

For Resolution 47: This criticises the sectarianism on the Women's Committee which has held back activity and calls for working with women's groups where it is possible to argue for a working class orientation.

For Resolution 49: This commits the party to a position on gay rights.

For Resolution 50 as amended by the NEC and the National Women's Committee: Both the amendments commit the party to organising its own campaign on contraception but also to supporting the activities of CAP when they take place.

RA-RA-RANK-FILE ! OR FIGHTING FOR SOCIALISM IN THE WORKPLACES + THE UNIONS

According to the Constitution, there should be no problem. "The SLP shall work to build a strong rank and file organisation on the shop floor and within the unions". It could hardly be plainer. Yet, as in other areas, serious deeds have fallen well below the fine words. One year later, can we honestly say that the whole party has worked to build such organisations? Can we, even, honestly say that the whole party is convinced such work is valid? This article takes a look at why the SLP must devote resources to this area, why some sections of the party seem unwilling or unable to do so and offers some guidance as to what we could be doing.

First of all, what is meant by "rank and file"? In general terms, it simply refers to the broad mass of ordinary, working people and is used to differentiate them from the various bureaucracies, in all walks of life, which claim to (but mostly do not) represent their interests. Thus, we can speak of rank and file trade unionists and the trade union bureaucracy, or for that matter, rank and file Labour Party members and the Labour Party bureaucracy, etc. This is not the place to deal with such matters as the characteristics and growth of specific bureaucracies. Suffice it to say, that under capitalism, all bureaucracies tend to be elitist, undemocratic, reformist, collaborationist and socially distinct from ordinary working people.

Socialism is, of course, above everything, about ordinary working-people controlling their own lives. It is about power to the rank and file. Further, this power cannot be handed down, the state cannot be captured in the name of the people. The people, the rank and file, must take power themselves. The role of the bureaucracies is to help capitalism prevent this process. The mis-leaders of the working class deflect working class struggles into safe, reformist channels and act as mouthpieces for capitalist ideology. As socialists, we cannot, therefore, be anything but totally committed to the development of rank and file power in all its forms. Our consistent task is to expose and smash the bureaucracies and help the class develop its own independent, democratic and revolutionary leadership. Indded, without such organisation there will be no revolution.

Socialist shorthand often uses the term "rank and file" specifically in relation to the trade unions. It is no accident. The trade union bureaucracy is the single most powerful bureaucracy in modern, western capitalism and the industrial struggle of rank and file workers is the single most important struggle in the overthrow of capitalism. That is not to say that other struggles are unimportant. The anti-imperialist struggle, the struggle against the oppression of women, etc., all contribute to the revolutionary process. Yet, without the struggle for workers control at the point of production, there can be no revolutionary change in society. Capitalism, as a total system, rests upon the exploitation of workers as workers. And that's, ultimately, where it will also fall because it is the working class, organised in the workplaces and in the unions (and under the leadership of a revolutionary socialist party), that has the power to overthrow it.

It is a very peculiar revolutionary socialist party, then, that doesn't consider involvement in the industrial struggles of the working class to be of primary importance and, even when it does involve itself, fails to

consistently oppose the trade union bureaucracy and promote the independent organisation of the rank and file. Yet by and large, through mis-
haps, neglect or whatever, this has been the record of the SLP. Why so?

Well, it is undeniable that the social make-up of the party is not conducive to understanding the need for industrial work. It is a fair assumption that a majority of party members are not from the industrial working class. There are a large number of professional people - teachers, journalists, etc. Even amongst industrial workers, few are shop stewards or trade union activists. Let's be clear about this. No one is saying that teachers, for example, have no role to play in the party - far from it. What we must be saying is that, in order for the party to seriously intervene in industrial struggle, in order for the party to become the revolutionary leadership of the class, rather than for the class, then we must emphasise recruitment of worker-militants and ensure they assume leading positions. This is, of course, a gradual process, yet it is vital we begin on it now.

Perhaps an even more important obstacle to our developing a rank and file strategy has been the reformist ideology brought into the party by certain elements from the Labour Party (exacerbated by the fact that many of these elements have constituted the leadership for the first year.) In general, this ideology, as expressed for example in the old person of the Left, opposed the self-activity of the class as "adventurist" and substituted the illusion of progress through gradual reform within the system - generally via the election of self-appointed "leaders", to the Dail. Today the total strategy is rarely spelt out, but elements of it still filter through. The most damaging of these is the supposed divorce of "trade unionism" and "politics". In essence there is a perspective which asserts that the industrial struggles of workers are apolitical, and that while workers should be left alone to get on with their "purely economic" demands, we, the socialists, should take care of their "political aspirations". This is rubbish. There is no such thing as a "purely economic" demand. Every wage demand, to a greater or lesser extent, threatens the stability of capitalism. Every shop-floor struggle raises the confidence and class-consciousness of workers. The task of socialists is to lead such struggles, to widen them and draw out the political implications. To ignore such work is to abdicate our responsibilities to the class.

Worse, to ignore trade union work is to leave control in the hands of the trade union bureaucracy. It is no use crying "sell-out" in Socialist Labour, yet not be willing to dirty our hands in the unions by consistently fighting for an independent rank and file leadership. The reformists are content to leave the trade union bureaucracy alone. Unfortunately, this attitude is reinforced somewhat by some on the left of the party who, whilst sharing our views on the need for socialists to involve themselves in the work places and unions, refuse to tackle the bureaucracy head on and argue that the rank and file have an identity of interest with a section of the bureaucracy and should ally with them in a broad, progressive "current". This is to seriously misjudge the nature of bureaucracies and tends to divert energy from the principle task - that of building up the independence and combativity of ordinary workers.

All these problems - the social composition of the party, the reformist ideology, illusions over alliances - have prevented the party, over its first year, performing its main task: establishing a revolutionary socialist presence in the workplaces and unions. How could we be going about this work? The key is building from the base upwards.

The basic unit of organisation must be the workplace - factory, office

or school. It is important to stress that, although emphasis by the party must be on factory organisation, this does not mean we can neglect the white collar and professional areas. The issues taken up will, of course, differ but the organisational methods are pretty much the same. Indeed, with a great number of existing party members in white collar areas, our implantation could produce rapid results - especially in the trade unions. In the factories, our membership is spread far and wide. There are probably no more than half a dozen factories throughout the country where we have more than one member. This leads to great isolation of our worker militants and a feeling of helplessness in the face of the union bureaucracy, apathy of workmates, etc. The principal task of the party is to break down this isolation. The party must act in a service role.

Each branch must devote major resources to the factories in its area where we have a member or good contacts. It will probably be necessary to assign two or three members (students, unemployed, professionals, housewives, etc.) to a particular factory. What would this servicing consist of?

1. Paper sales - it is vital that regular sales are made either on the gate or inside the factory.
2. Workplace bulletins - this will not always be feasible but, wherever possible, we should work towards an SLP and supporters group inside the factory producing a small-scale but regular bulletin which both takes up factory problems from a socialist view and introduces the workers to our general politics.
3. Public meetings - the branch must organise public meetings, leafleting, etc. in the area wherever there is major struggle in their factories both to build solidarity and for propaganda.
4. Discussion - for isolated militants discussion with fellow socialists on work problems is essential. Every branch meeting should include this. This all adds up to slow and very unglamorous slog. Yet it is the only way we can establish ourselves in the workplaces.

And it is really only when a revolutionary socialist presence has been established in a number of significant workplaces (and a presence tested in struggle) that we can talk about building a national rank and file movement with a real base in the class. In the meantime, we must, as a party, do everything to promote the slender flowerings of rank and file organisation where they do exist and encourage the growth of others. Thus, for example, SLP members have already taken the initiative in laying the basis for building small rank and file groups in the ITGWU and in the teachers' unions. We need to devote considerable resources to encouraging and developing these beginnings.

But the key here is flexibility - there can be no "grand strategy". On one level it is essential that our worker-militants take the lead in establishing the base structures - shop steward committees across unions in the factory, combine committees across factories in a group, industry committees, etc. But also, we must not neglect the organisation of rank and file groups within specific unions. The two types go hand in hand and are based on the same premises - organisation of rank and file workers independent of the bureaucracy, demands based upon a militant socialist answer to the bosses attacks, and a structure open to every militant (whatever politics or none) willing to fight. The specific task of the trade union rank and file group is the fight for democracy in the unions, the fight to return the unions to the democratic control of the members. Creating and sustaining such organisations is primarily the task of our worker-militants involved, but the party as a whole must give both direction and servicing. Direction, because only the party can see the class struggle in its totality, decide the key demands to be made and intervene where most necessary. Servicing, because right now our worker-militants are too few to carry the load alone.

The final question is, can the SLP, as presently structured, perform these tasks? It is not so much a question of principle - remember we are formally committed to building rank and file organisations - it is more a question of will. Not solely, of course. Objective conditions in the class always determine the limits within which revolutionaries can work. But within those limits, has the party the overall perspective, in practice, of the work described in this article? The perspective described adds up to a fairly radical change in the practice of the party, and ultimately in the nature of the party. In the final analysis, we are arguing for a revolutionary workers party. A party based in the workplaces, a party with branches based on factories and estates rather than parliamentary constituencies, a party leading workers in struggle, a party resolutely opposing all bureaucracies, a party with majority class composition and led by worker-militants, a party linking political and economic struggles on the shopfloor, in the schools, in the unions and on the streets, a party committed to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Is this the kind of party the current leadership wants? No - reformism, left or right, wants anything but. All those who wish to build a genuine revolutionary socialist party have no choice but to reject the reformists in the current leadership and replace them with people committed to the kind of policies and work described here.

FREE CONTRACEPTION ON DEMAND !

For a few months prior to the introduction of Haughey's new bill on contraception, it should have been clear to all with eyes to see that the SLP was the most active party campaigning for full free contraception on demand. That activity was, certainly, limited to some extent, because of the arguments raging within the party on the exact nature of our campaign. Nevertheless the party did succeed in holding a series of public meetings on the issue - particularly in Dublin North Central and South East, Dun Laoghaire and Navan, a major rally in the Mansion House and a fairly respectable picket on Dail Eireann. During the course of these activities we were able to address ourselves to a small but enthusiastic audience who were angry at any suggestion that we should go back to the old puritanical restrictions on contraception. Yet the most disheartening thing about Haughey's Family Planning Bill, apart from its total inadequacy, is that he might just get away with it because of the weakness of the campaign for full rights to contraception on demand. Haughey has demonstrated that the only pressure group he feels the need to respond to is the Church. The bishops must be very pleased with themselves. In clarifying the legal position of Contraception in this country, Haughey has satisfied them, and, simultaneously the interests of doctors, pharmacists and contraceptive suppliers. He has, of course, done nothing for the women of this country whose right to access to contraception has been most cynically ignored.

THE NEW LAW

Under the new legislation women will be worse off than they were before. Because all contraceptives can only be obtained by doctor's prescription, women are totally at the mercy of their doctors, who for the most part are likely to be conservative, Catholic and male. In Limerick, where where they have a family planning clinic, a doctor has to be imported from Dublin because no doctor in Limerick or in the surrounding area is prepared to staff the clinic. At that rate of going, how many doctors around the country are likely to be prepared to prescribe contraception, given the conscience clause? Even when they are, how many will be prepared to interpret "for medical reasons" to prescribe to single people? Despite the fact that doctors will probably not be charged under the law for giving contraceptives to single people, the whole aim of the bill is to deprive single people of the access to contraception they previously enjoyed. A few may slip through the net but the vast majority - particularly those in rural areas - will attend doctors who will vigorously enforce the "bona fide family planning" clause. Making medical practitioners the arbiters of who, if anybody, qualifies for contraception is a sickening cop-out on the part of the Fianna Fail government. The IMA may still reject this role, but then doctors stand to gain a lot of money from this arrangement. The pharmacists, of course, have it very cushy, and the net result of prescription and pharmacists' fees will mean that the price of even a box of condoms will be ludicrously inflated. A long way from free contraception on demand! Thus the working class and those living in the country will continue to be blessed with the patter of tiny feet, while the middle classes of Dublin will be allowed to choose.

One of the most hypocritical things in the bill is the reiteration of the legal position on abortion when the bill effectively restricts

access to contraception to married people only. And when ignorance about sexuality is rampant in Ireland (CAP claim that they sell more sex information booklets than contraceptives in their shop) there will be no programme of education set up and the censorship laws remain unchanged. And even though more than 100,000 Irish women have chosen to use 'artificial' methods of contraception, money will be invested in developing and promoting 'natural' methods. And the Health boards will all provide natural family planning clinics. The government is doing their dirty work for the bishops.

While the facilities for those using the 'natural methods' are increased (and state-aided) the users of non-Catholic methods face attacks on all fronts - even if they are married. Under Haughey's proposals, the present private clinics will have to apply for a license. Those clinics which have been most outspoken in the current campaigns, and in particular the services run by the students unions, could lose their applications. As a result, thousands who have enjoyed friendly, expert and comprehensive advice on all aspects of contraception might once again be forced to return to private doctors who have refused to cater for their needs in the past.

That Haughey could produce a bill in 1978, totally concerned as it is with appeasing the Church, demonstrates the failure of both women's groups and the left in the Labour Movement to mobilise the support they undoubtedly have. The Contraception Action Programme failed because it attempted to be only an umbrella group of representative groups (I.C.T.U., Wicca Collective, Family Planning Clinics, Labour Party Women, Etc.) with an emphasis on respectability. Respectability, it was thought, could be guaranteed by keeping political groups off their platform (particularly the S.L.P.) and by appealing to liberal middle class sentiments. As has been proved on many occasions, the liberal Irish middle class is at best almost permanently dormant or non-existent. CAP failed completely to orientate to the working class and to the trade union movement - despite the fact that it had an excellent resolution from the I.C.T.U. to build on. As a result it proved itself to be a paper organisation masquerading as a broad front. This was particularly evident when only 400 people turned up at its rally on December 2nd - most of them from the left, or from the radical women's groups. Haughey could then claim, as the League of Decency would argue, that CAP only represented a vociferous minority.

Unfortunately, some S.L.P. members argued for S.L.P. to concentrate on working within CAP and building it rather than for the S.L.P. to put its resources into building its own campaign. At the National Women's Committee meeting in December, however, it was decided that the S.L.P. should adopt the latter policy, i.e., attempt to build a mass campaign based on the Labour movement and only send an observer to CAP meetings to liaise between the two groups. The question really is how do we go about building such a campaign.

Quite obviously, the best way to reach the broadest audience and to obtain the maximum impact is through a united campaign with other left or Labour parties. Such a united front, however, must be geared to specific activities - e.g., organising demonstrations - rather than based on general verbal opposition to Haughey's Bill. But it is precisely that commitment to organising activity that jars most on the ears of parties like the Labour Party or the SFWP. Already, an attempt by the Young Socialists in the Party to bring together all the left wing youth organisations - the Connolly Youth Movement, the Irish Democratic Youth Movement, the Labour Party Youth - to launch a campaign around the issue fell on deaf ears; more recently a call by the

Standing Committee to build a united front with the other left parties has met with very little response from them.

What strategy then could the SLP adopt? We must first make it absolutely clear that we are for a united campaign on the issue and officially invite the other left wing parties to launch such a campaign. We could also support any concrete initiatives that CAP takes - even though we recognise that it is not the broad based umbrella organisation it claims to be.

But we should also make it clear that we are not prepared to wait around indefinitely; that we are prepared to launch our own campaign in order to try to defeat the bill. Our ability to launch such a campaign is, in fact, the best way to ensure that other parties are drawn out of their current inactivity. Such a campaign must include a series of well organised public meetings in working class areas where we have branches. In Dublin, the co-ordination and back-up for such meetings can be provided by the Dublin Regional Committee. Such meetings should be directed to the organisation of activities on the local housing estates, e.g., the taking up of petitions. In the unions, our members should push for a model resolution which commits the branch to the I.C.T.U. position and calls for a massive educational campaign within the union. Where we have members in local trades councils and in students unions, we should press for those bodies to organise their own campaign and meetings.

The SLP must be prepared to meet its commitment on this issue. It now remains for SLP members to take it up seriously in their unions, trades councils, and communities. Only a mass movement in response to Haughey's bill will have any chance of preventing it becoming law. CAP can't do it. It's up to the SLP to take the initiatives.

RELATIVES ACTION COMMITTEES

The National Question Policy Document passed by the last Conference and the NEC includes in Section 9 a call to support and join the Relatives Action Committees. Since that time a few members of the SLP have constantly attacked the RACs and SLP support for them. And resolution 16 (Action Programme on the National Question) presented to this conference seeks to replace Section 9, neglecting to include support for the RACs.

It is the intention of this article to provide background information on the RACs and their activities and to argue why socialists should join and support the RACs.

The RAC was organised in Belfast in April 1976 as a direct response to the British government's criminalisation policy which included plans to phase out political status for convicted prisoners. The government saw this as a way to divide the prisoners off from their support in the community by calling them criminals and treating them as 'ordinary prisoners'. This was a period when the mass movement in the North was steadily declining. Since the ending of internment a few months before, there had been no central issue around which to attract wider support. It was a time when the left wing groups were small and incapable of any independent activity. The Provisional Republican movement was, as well, confused and didn't know what to do about the political status issue. They decided it wasn't one that could attract wide support and then, and many times since, decided not to try and build around that issue.

The RAC was begun by independent republicans, relatives of prisoners who had status, members of left groups like PD, ICSP, RRP, and independent left wingers and Provos. The core activists in the RACs have always been those republicans and socialists who realised the importance of the political status issue and its link to the struggle against British Imperialism. Many saw this issue as the way to redevelop the confidence of the people in the areas to use their own strength to fight back rather than rely on the Provos to do the fighting.

The blanket protest which began in September 1976, the increased number of prisoners being channeled through the torture cells and the courts and the general increase in repression over the past two years has brought into the RACs more relatives, particularly mothers, and friends of prisoners. Eventually Belfast had 20 active RACs, and last summer several RACs were built in other areas in the North.

Structure

The early RAC meetings were one long struggle for democracy - usually against Sinn Fein. After years of republican domination in the areas, local members argued for and won democratic organisation - like elected chair at meetings, voting by delegates, etc. Eventually Belfast evolved a central structure to organise the activities of its local groups. Central leadership is elected by voting delegates from the local areas. Weekly meetings of delegates decide on policy and tactics for Belfast. Any important resolutions are given a week's notice so local groups can discuss the issue and instruct their delegates.

There were several attempts by the Belfast RAC to expand outside of the city, recognising the need for a six county wide organisation. None of these succeeded. However people responded to the increase of repression and the increasing number of prisoners coming into H Block from the country areas by building their own RACs during the past year. Now RACs exist in several areas of Derry, Tyrone and Antrim. There is no formal structure linking them, but unity is being achieved through joint activity. The Coalisland march and the recent Burntollet march were built by joint committees with the most serious commitment coming from the RACs.

Sinn Fein

Those critics of the RAC who refer to it as Provo dominated do not understand the situation at all. For Sinn Fein's own attitude toward the RAC has been full of contradictions. Though they have vied to gain organisationally by focussing on political status and most to lose by a defeat on this issue, they have vacillated in the RAC precisely because they don't control it. They don't know how to and don't want to work with organisations that are not their own. They therefore have moved from attempts at total domination of the RAC to total neglect and non-support of the RAC. In the campaign for political status the conflicts between Sinn Fein and the RAGs have centred around democracy, working with other groups, and differing attitudes towards activity. The thrust of Sinn Fein politics has been to tell the masses 'depend upon us, we've got the power'. The RAC depends on the strength of the people themselves. For instance, in planning marches, Sinn Fein insists on marching within the ghetto so a rally can be held to show how many support Sinn Fein. The RAC is willing to break out of the ghetto, confront the police and the British Army, sit down in the city centre, etc.

Arguments about working with other groups have caused serious division within the anti-imperialist movement. During the past few months the Provos have been on a pure sectarian binge, hijacking marches and refusing to work with others. The Coalisland march, the Kiaran Nugent march and now the Burntollet march have produced confrontations between the RAC and Sinn Fein, with SF presently threatening to withdraw support from the RAC because of its cooperation with others.

It is important to note here that in spite of these political and tactical differences, most of the RAC members are republicans. Just as the entire national question and the fight against British Imperialism is dominated by republicanism and will be as long as socialists insist on staying outside the struggle. However, many of the women are in the RAC because of their children and in spite of their disagreement with Provo politics. Others, like Mary Nellis in Derry, are in the RAC because they saw the SDLP wasn't going to do anything on the political status issue.

United Action

Unity of all the groups in the anti-imperialist movement is extremely important. United action gives people confidence that we can work together and build. There have been several attempts at unity in the past few years. We had a number of united marches and meetings at the time of the Peace People. The Burntollet march was the best recent example of our being able to work together - socialists and republicans. The RAC attitude toward unity has been consistently in favour. It has been through the RAC that in Belfast, at least, the groups have been in anyway able to work together. It was because of the confidence that was felt during the early united marches and the realisation that the left should be involved in the fight for political status, that the RAC voted to ask for each group to send a representative to the weekly meetings. At times up to ten groups attended. We could speak, but not vote. Often we led and dominated the political debate (on issues like march tactics, the Church, the UN, need for creches). It is these representatives that were withdrawn recently, not the 'left being expelled' as we've been told by critics. The decision by the RAC was that only people who are active in building the local RACs can come to central meetings. It was more of an attack on Sinn Fein, than on the left. It is an unfortunate decision as it leaves less pressure on SF to openly defend their positions. As well, because of the limited activity of most of the left, it leaves the field in the RAC to the RRP, the most active group, but a group that uncritically tails the Provos.

TUCAR

The RAC has been attacked as an alternative to TUCAR. Quite the contrary. To be a member of TUCAR you have to be a trade unionist. What should all the housewives, unemployed, young people do who want to fight on the issue of H Block? We tell them stay home - support TUCAR? Forget the organising of the areas in Belfast and the rest of the north? Rather than being an alternative to TUCAR,

the RaC has always encouraged the building of TUCAR. They have fought for TUCAR speakers to be included on platforms. And they have learned the lessons of TUCAR in Belfast. When marches and meetings are planned, the factories and building sites are now included as targets of support. In spite of the sectarianism we in TUCAR have a good working arrangement with the RAC. They do the communities. We in TUCAR do the factories and building sites for marches and meetings.

Women

One of the very important things the RAC has done is draw women into the struggle, not just as followers and auxiliaries of the Provos, but as leaders. Women organise and lead the RAOs. They debate the political issues, plan activities, organise the areas. They have sent speakers on tours to Britain and the continent. They treat this work very seriously and work to highlight the political rather than the emotional issues around political status. Their speakers in England have very well linked up the role of the troops, the Courts, and the whole system of British Imperialism in arguing for support for political status. Women who before were 'just housewives' are now leaders of thousands. The Provos would like to keep women in the kitchen. But the women's involvement in the RAC has changed that. They have learned through the struggle not to be pushed around by the British Army or the RUC. But now they are learning not to be pushed around by the SDLP, the Provos or the left. Only simple minded sectarianism could oppose that.

Overall, the activities of the RAC have developed a base of support for the political status issue far wider than either Sinn Fein or the left could have done on their own. The prisoners own fight and the resistance in the areas has defeated Mason's plan of criminalisation. The activities of the RAC have opened up again political alternatives in the fight against British Imperialism - alternatives to the military-only strategy of the Provos and the do nothing attitude of the sectarian socialists.

SLP

The SLP should reaffirm its support for the RAC by

- 1) rejecting resolution 16.
- 2) Building SLP meetings on the H Block issue. Invite members of the RAC to speak at the meetings. This is particularly important in the South where there is limited support for the issue.
- 3) Encouraging its members in Belfast and Derry to join the RACs, particularly those members who are not active in TUCAR.

SLP LEADERSHIP AND THE NORTH

Over the past ten years thousands of people have been won to revolutionary politics through the struggle against British Imperialism. Many have realised the politics of the Provos or the Officials will not win the struggle. Some have given up in defeat. Many others are looking for alternatives.

Workers in the North, both Catholic and Protestant, have to fight a highly repressive system, where the failure of capitalism is clearly exposed, through the system of repression, the inequality, the low wages, high unemployment, rotten housing. Workers have been fighting political repression for years. We are now beginning to see struggles on the wage and unemployment issue as well. For the Irish revolution to succeed, workers in the North must be won to socialism. They must be won away from both republican and loyalist ideologies.

The North then presents both potential for growth and a challenge to the SLP. The SLP could have begun to tackle that challenge by appointing an organiser for the North, and organising a series of public meetings in the major towns. It could have built the Trade Union and Unemployed Group in the North, organised strike support for northern workers, built an unemployment campaign. It could have taken a lead on the issues of repression, North and South, by having

SOUTH AND THE NORTH

SLP meetings on political status and repression, and by building TUCAR in the trade unions and work places where the SLP has a presence.

Instead the SLP leadership has chosen to ignore the North and the National Question. Where it could not be ignored, the statements made by SLP leaders seem set on saying 'we don't want the north' and 'we particularly are not interested in winning republicans and others who are serious about the national question.' The need to build a branch in Belfast, the second largest industrial city and the most divided city in Ireland has been ignored or treated as just another place in Ireland. The problems of working in Belfast the question of Protest Workers, the urgency of the national question cannot be ignored by any organisation that seriously intends to build.

The statements and press releases of the leadership seem bent on destroy what little we in the north were able to do. John Daly's speech in Derry, (Oct. 4) and Noel Browne's letter to the Irish Times (Jan. 9) opposing political status are the most publicised examples of the leadership's disregard for positions decided by the members on the national question issue. And rather than take their disagreement to the members and debate them within the party, they have chosen to display their opposition to the struggle in the North through the letters columns of Hibernia and the Irish Times.

Spokespersons have been appointed by the party on every issue under the sun except on the North and the National Question, which is so central a political issue. And press statements by the PRO have covered every issue except, again, the national question. Perhaps that's a good thing, because we never know what the PRO would say. We have fought for years through out the world to convince the media and the public the the fight in Ireland is not over religion. But when Dermot Boucher wrote a letter to Hibernia he criticised the Provos who attack "his co-religionists"! And he claims to be a non-sectarian socialist. On the other hand did Boucher issue any statements to the press when the RUC rerouted the Burntollet march? Or when one of what he calls "his co-religionists" tried to shoot the marchers?

I should like to remind members of what the organisation voted for last May, in the policy document on the national question: "Such a party aims to bring the working class to the head of the struggle against imperialist repression and against sectarianism as an integral part of the fight for a worker's state." The SLP leadership has shown it was not willing or able to lead even the party membership on the question of repression and imperialism.

Party decisions to support marches in the North or build meetings in the South were acted on by only a very few members who acted on their own initiative. The Party proved unwilling to mobilise its own potential strength to fight repression. Events like Willy Gallagher's hunger strike, the use of the PTA against Belfast dockers, and TUCAR leader Joe Edwards passed without serious SLP protest or activity. Because the SLP neglected to organise independent activity and itself bring these issues into the working class, our involvement as an organisation was limited to joining activities organised by other groups, like the Provos and the IRSP. While some members joined in activities and spoke from platforms, that was not enough. An organisation of over 200 members could build its own activities.

In order to become the party that could begin to lead the working class, we need to have a leadership that will treat the national question as the urgent issue it is, and that has a serious commitment to mobilise the SLP to join the fight against repression and build the "Party in both parts of Ireland."

ANTI-NUKE OK!

To the surprise of some, the anti-nuclear movement in this country has proved itself able to mobilise thousands on the issue. The Carnsore Rally during the summer was one of the biggest demonstrations against the government in the South for some time. And it was not just a flash in the pan. Despite its libertarian and anarchist forms of organisation, a network of anti-nuke groups have established themselves around the country. Over 300 people attended a 'mass conference' in the State Cinema in Phibsborough a few months ago to discuss the future of the movement.

The SLP has devoted some resources to intervening in this movement. At our conference in May '78 we voted to oppose the proposed construction of the nuclear power plant at Carnsore Point. Following from that members and branches of the party have joined the anti-nuke groups and made a significant showing at the meeting in the State Cinema. However, one tendency within the SLP, the Workers Alliance for Action, continues to oppose the party's commitment to the anti-nuclear movement. The arguments put forward by the WAA against the anti-nuclear stand of the party are therefore worth considering, if for no other reasons than their uniqueness. They may be summarised as follows:

That the company kept by the party in the anti-nuclear movement - environmentalists and ecologists who are opposed to growth in general - are often 'anti-socialist' and 'downright reactionary' - put the party in the position of opposing nuclear power in principle. To oppose any technology in principle is primitivist and ignores the fact that it is the use to which technology is put under capitalism that leads to the evils associated with the technology, for instance, unemployment. Further, it is claimed, that socialists who attempt to hold back technological and scientific developments within capitalism are interfering with the growth of the forces of production, which by sharpening the contradictions within capitalism, makes the task of the workers' revolution easier. The battle should not, according to the WAA, be against nuclear power but for workers' control of the nuclear industry which will open up the struggle for workers' control of all industry and ultimately of the state. In this context to oppose nuclear power on grounds such as the deliberate secrecy and mystery which surround it is a red herring detracting from the real struggle, which is the struggle for control of the nuclear industry and the state. Finally the WAA feel that the dangers of nuclear power have been exaggerated and that further research will produce methods of rendering the technology safe. Nuclear power 'if rendered safe' may, according to the WAA, be the only technological way out of the present energy crisis and the answer to socialist humanity's energy needs.

The last point is, of course, the most crucial as it is begging the whole question. Few would oppose nuclear power 'if rendered safe'. Most of the evidence, however, suggests that nuclear power is not safe and presents totally unacceptable risks to human life. It is very dubious for revolutionary socialists to assume that capitalism, at present, is expanding at such a scale to need massive increases and new forms of energy. But there can be no doubt that the anarchic competition in this system and the greed for the profit means that capitalists would be quite prepared to take those unacceptable risks with a technology as dangerous as nuclear power. Put simply, nuclear power cannot be trusted to the capitalist class precisely because it is not 'rendered safe' and because it is totally utopian to expect

resources will be devoted to 'rendering it safe' in the system. . Further, while there exists, it is true, the possibility that under socialism, with the development of new technology and the removal of the profit motive nuclear power will be made safe, it is naive to suppose that a change, however radical, in the organisation of society, will alter the radioactive nature of plutonium. The SLP is anti-nuclear first and foremost because it is dangerous. This perspective is shared with all those who are anti-nuclear, whatever their ideological leanings.

The other WAA arguments raise questions about the SLP's participation as a socialist party in the anti-nuclear movement, and stigmatises the latter as a reformist deviation from the path of a socialist strategy for workers' control over industry and the state. I believe, however, that they rest on a basic misconception of what the SLP is attempting to achieve within the anti-nuclear movement.

It is true that the anti-nuclear movement is at present made up to some extent of environmentalists and zero-growth freaks. To be in this movement is not, of course, to accept their arguments. The very fact of their preponderance within the movement calls for a large socialist presence to ensure that the campaign takes the direction of opposition, not only to nuclear power, but to the type of economic development which has allowed it to grow. If socialists decide to rest on the purity of their own isolation, the connections between nuclear and the system which lies behind it cannot be made. The hundreds and thousands of people who are mobilised by the anti-nuclear movement are then only made aware of the non-socialists' ecological argument. Just as we participate in other movements which allow us to argue for our points of view, so too must we participate in and fight for the leadership of the anti-nuclear movement. The whole development of nuclear power has been dictated by and subordinated to the needs of capitalism. To this extent, nuclear technology differs only in degree from other technologies, e.g., chemical technologies whose operation present dangers to humanity's health and life and to civil and public rights. However, in one significant feature it is different from these technologies. It is the first technology developed not as a result of market forces but which was from the start a creation of the state and needed the full weight of state intervention, incentive, and guarantees to lift it off the ground. The state and capitalism in collusion have created the nuclear power industry: the tricks of this trade are guarantees to the company that liabilities for accidents incurred cannot legally exceed a certain amount and assurances that considerations of 'national security' will shield the company from giving vital information about safety, etc., to Trade Union negotiators within the plant. The state has identified itself with the nuclear industry to the extent of making an attack on nuclear power tantamount to an attack on the state. Such has been the case on the continent where fantastic police brutality and repression has met the anti-nuke demonstrations.

The WAA appears to argue that the attack on nuclear power should take place after the construction of nuclear plants. So behind the radical phraseology and the doctrinaire correctness, there is a fantastic pessimism: let them build the plants and then we will begin the battle for workers' control. The possibilities of successfully waging such a struggle are not even considered. The likelihood is slight of building workers' consciousness in an industry where workers are screened before employment, constantly spied on at the workplace, denied access to the information normally available to Trade Union negotiators for collective bargaining, denied the right to strike and whose collective and individual rights are more limited than those of any other workers. In the meantime

before the advent of workers' control and socialism, the WAA condemns us to the worst of both possible worlds - nuclear power under capitalism.

The same case may be made against the WAA position that to oppose nuclear power is to interfere with the sharpening of the contradictions of capitalism - contradictions between the social nature of mass production and technology and its still privately owned character. Socialists are therefore to see something progressive in these contradictions because the task of revolution is made easier as these contradictions become more acute. Leaving aside the point that this perspective seems to imply that the sharpening of contradictions in itself will be sufficient cause for the revolution and that the building of workers' consciousness is not an equally necessary precondition for successful revolution, the WAA are not taking into account the fact that though the capitalists are the ultimate victims of the sharpening of contradictions within capitalism, the victims in the here and now are the working class. The WAA do not want us to oppose nuclear power on the grounds that it cuts down on employment in the energy industry because this 'contradiction' has to be borne with and to oppose nuclear power on the basis of it is to be 'anti-technology'. This is simply not the case. Any technology can be used to create jobs easier or harder, to create jobs and to cut down on jobs. Under capitalism technology is chiefly used to cut down on jobs. The job-cutting nature of the nuclear industry under capitalism coupled with the extremely repressive nature of its employment, must be condemned. This is particularly so when there are alternative forms of energy available and when massive employment can be created in eliminating the waste of energy - the waste on which nuclear power depends for its justification. Nuclear power must also be condemned for the secrecy and deliberate mystery which surrounds it. While the WAA see a place for the struggle against secrecy, it is in the context of the struggle for workers' control of the nuclear industry. But it is because nuclear power is dangerous that secrecy and mystery are vital to the industry, and thus a fundamental attribute of it, not just a contingent feature. Therefore, it is not possible to wage a struggle against secrecy without calling into question all the grounds on which the nuclear rests. The fact that, as the WAA points out, secrecy and "mistique with information" are a feature of capitalism in general, makes this issue a suitable starting point for broadening the campaign into a critique of capitalism and preventing it from becoming a single-issue based on emotionalism and protest.

THE ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENT

Given that the SLP see the struggle against nuclear power as part of a broader struggle against capitalism, what are its chances of influencing the Irish anti-nuclear movement in this direction? It must be recognised from the outset that all of those objecting to the proposed plant at Carnore are not in the movement which is at present made up of local autonomous groups. However, this movement does represent the bulk of young people opposed to nuclear power and therefore affords socialists an opportunity to influence the theoretical and strategic direction the movement will take. Up to now there has been little chance to do this for two reasons: firstly, because much of the time of the movement has been occupied with discussing how it is going to organise itself internally, and secondly, because for many in the movement being anti-nuclear is a symbolic gesture of protest, defiance and counter-culture, and there is a general reluctance to discuss the deeper reasons for opposition to nuclear power. The latter aspect of the movement must be fought; the belief that a campaign can be run through mass euphoria and enthusiasm alone must be defeated if

the movement is not to collapse in exhaustion and disillusion after a year or two. The question of internal organisation has been a major stumbling block for all in the anti-nuclear movement. Revolutionary Struggle, who were behind the original Carnsore festival and are strong within the movement favour organising the movement on the basis of "mass democracy" where every member has an equal say in decision-making at the quarterly mass meetings and local groups operate completely autonomously in between these meetings. They oppose election of officers at group level or the setting up of any national structure for the movement except on the basis of ad hoc groups of volunteers for specific purposes (e.g. the organising of mass movements). Elections, delegation and centralization lead, according to RS, to the inevitable abdication of responsibility on the part of the ordinary member and the development of a "them and us" situation within the movement. These arguments are very persuasive for members of the anti-nuclear movement who have had little political experience. However, the opening up of the discussion on nuclear power by SLP members and others, should convince members that the campaign is a national issue which raises national questions for the movement - e.g. the question of a referendum and a public inquiry - which cannot be dealt with by local groups working in isolation, and that the odds against the movement are such that all resources at our disposal - weight of numbers, geographical spread, possibility of using the media, political channels, workplace and street agitation - must be used in a collective and rationalised way to combat them. This calls for some form of structure in the movement. The argument to be won is that this will not necessarily be a hierarchical or authoritarian one which will detract from the autonomy of the local groups, and that the latter will benefit from being part of a larger movement. Those involved in this structure must be elected, not self-appointed volunteers because there is a danger of the same people - those with the greatest initiative, political experience, contacts, etc. - doing all the volunteering. As jurisdictions will not be clearly defined it will be difficult to hold individuals responsible for their actions and confusion and suspicion will grow within the movement. At the moment, it seems that many ordinary members have seen, in the fiasco of the mass meeting at the State, the dangers presented by the RS position. Now is a good time therefore to set about attempting to influence the movement in the direction of coherent organisation. The coming months are therefore crucial ones in the SLP's involvement in the anti-nuclear movement.

EEC ELECTIONS

We have seen during the last number of weeks a massive amount of activity and propaganda in connection with the European Elections. Leaflets explaining the background to the elections, constituency boundaries, etc. have been produced by the score. The 'Progressive Democrats' (i.e. Fianna Fail and the Gaullists) held a conference on the elections in Cork. The European social democratic parties including the Irish Labour Party and the SDLP have agreed on a common manifesto for the elections. Even Sinn Féin - The Workers Party - once strong opponents of the EEC, have jumped on the bandwagon. They, having gone to Brussels on a sponsored 'fact finding' mission and having presumably found the 'facts' to their liking, are going to ask for funds to be provided to them by the EEC Commission to allow them to contest the elections. The whole political spectrum from the left to right seem to have been caught up in the whirlwind of the European elections.

The NEC of the SLP has apparently also decided to contest the elections. Apparently, because if you read their resolution carefully it is a decision made in the abstract realm of "in principle" and allows for the escape clause that it may not actually be practical to run at all. But be that as it may, it is significant that the decision was made without any sort of reference to what our policy on the EEC should be. Bowled over by an enthusiasm for electioneering, the NEC did not bother to ask, are we for or against the EEC? If we are against, what is the nature of our opposition?

How, then, can we characterise the EEC and the proposal to establish a European parliament? The EEC is essentially the product of an agreement between the different ruling classes relating to the way in which they organise their markets. The first move towards the EEC was the European Coal and Steel Community set up in 1952; this established a free market in these goods. The EEC itself was officially set up in 1957.

These events have to be seen in the context of the reconstruction of Europe after the second World War. Certain features of 'national capitalism' which existed prior to the war (i.e. the lack of freedom of movement of labour, goods and capital within Europe) were seen as a hindrance to the task of rebuilding capitalism in Europe and had therefore to be done away with. The EEC was an attempt to remove the traditional limitations on the development of each national European capitalism by means other than war.

Some people on the left saw this, and some still do, as the breaking down of national boundaries, and hence as something progressive. They have argued that it tends to strengthen the international solidarity of the Labour movement by providing new forums where the various trade union confederations and left parties could work together. But the advent of the Common Market does not mean that chauvinism ceases to be an ideological weapon in the hands of the ruling class. In fact, the reverse is probably the case. Because we are now in the first division of international competition there is greater pressure to pull together as a team, from a capitalist point of view. Further, the way decisions are arrived at in the EEC - through haggling between governments - creates an environment where nationalist talk can flourish.

Nor is international solidarity of the labour movement strengthened because the various bureaucrats get to meet each other more often. Real solidarity arises through struggle. Links between the official unions and, more importantly, the rank and file needs to be built independently of the new EEC institutions.

The EEC was therefore an attempt to solve the problems of capitalism by capitalist methods. It is aimed to rationalise and strengthen the system - inevitably at the expense of the working class. The EMS, for example, which in many ways expresses the logic of the EEC, is an attempt to limit the advantages which individual national capitalists might gain at each other's expense, through currency devaluation. In its place the EMS forces the weaker economies - including Ireland - to impose a greater discipline on themselves. Because they will not be able to use devaluation of their currencies to achieve a competitive advantage they will be forced to adopt rigorous deflationary policies: cuts in public spending, mass sackings and strong control over wages. In other words, through greater attacks on the working classes in every country.

The European elections are an attempt to legitimise the institutions of the EEC and to further consolidate capitalist rule in Europe. The idea of the elections being a facade is reinforced when it is seen that the European parliament won't have any powers; members will be only allowed to discuss proposals put before them, but will not have any power to implement them.

In opposing the EEC however there is a trap which some of the resolutions to the SLP conference are falling into - that is, the idea of 'national sovereignty' or, of a sovereign national parliament. Capitalism is an international system and it is impossible to exist isolated from the pressures and trends of international capitalism. It could never be said that 10 years ago when Ireland was not a member of the EEC that we had more control over our affairs than we have today. Chile under Allende considered that it had a 'sovereign national parliament' but that did not stop the American government from helping to institute a military coup. A call for a campaign for the withdrawal from the EEC on the basis of 'national sovereignty' can only help foster further illusions within the working class movement as to the nature of its national ruling class and the effect of such a campaign would be to hand a politically disarmed working class on a plate to the ruling class. The only alternative to the EEC is the United Socialist States of Europe.

There could, under certain circumstances, be an argument in favour of contesting the European elections and of using those elections in the same way as we use local and national elections. In the context of the SLP, however, considering our limited resources and manpower, it would be madness to contest the European elections. We are hoping in the local elections to organise small intensive local campaigns where we have some form of a base. A European election campaign would be quite different and would require a strong national party with roots throughout the country for it to be effective and for the party to gain the benefits in terms of national publicity, membership, etc that come out of nation-wide election campaigns. At this stage then, the participation of the SLP in the Euro-elections could only strengthen the trends to electoralism in the party.